CATALOGUES OF ART EXHIBITIONS ORGANIZED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN REPUBLISHED ON MICROFICHE

Published on microfiche by:

Chadwyck-Healey Ltd
45 South Street
Bishops Stortford
Herts CM23 3AG
England

Somerset House
417 Maitland Avenue
Teaneck
New Jersey 07666
USA

Date of publication and production of master: 1975

Series: The purpose of this series is to make available those catalogues that have lasting interest through their text or their illustrations. Catalogues and cumulations of titles in the series are available from the publishers

Serial numbers: Each title is given a seven-figure serial number in the top right hand corner of the microfiche title strip. This is an accession number. The first figure indicates the number of the list in which the title first appears; the first three-figure group signifies the gallery or museum; the second three-figure group the accession number for that title.

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Technical data:

Producing laboratory: Micromedia Ltd, Kidlington, Oxford.

Paintings, watercolours and drawings by W. G. GILLIES and JOHN MAXWELL

1954 The Arts Council of Great Britain

Cover: JOHN MAXWELL: Winter Bouquet: No 48

AN EXHIBITION OF PAINTINGS

WATERCOLOURS & DRAWINGS BY

W. G. Gillies and John Maxwell

1954

THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN

FOREWORD

THE ARTS COUNCIL welcomes this opportunity to show in London the first major collection of paintings by W. G. Gillies and John Maxwell to be seen here. These painters have an intimate knowledge and love of the countryside in which they live although their response to it differs so widely. To an English public, susceptible to the beauties of landscape, their work will have a strong appeal, the one for its direct approach and fluent draughtsmanship, the other for the poetic quality of the artist's vision. We are most grateful to the many owners, whose names are listed elsewhere, who have so kindly agreed to lend pictures from their collections. Our special thanks are due to Dr. R. A. Lillie who has lent so many works from his fine collection of paintings by W. G. Gillies; to Mr. R. H. Westwater who has written the introduction to the catalogue; to our colleagues of the Arts Council's Scottish Office, and to Mrs. Proudfoot of Messrs. Aitken Dott, who have given us so much help in organising this exhibition.

P.J.

INTRODUCTION

by R. H. Westwater

AMONG THE Scottish national traits less likely to be comprehended south of the Border is that epitomised in the forceful adage: "We'll keep oor ain fish guts for oor ain sea-maws." Scots have always exported their persons and their whisky in quantity, though usually with reluctance. But the best of Scottish artists, rightly or wrongly, seldom make much effort to acquire a larger public for their work than that provided by their own countrymen, with whose approbation they seem very contented. This attitude has been at least partly responsible for most of the belated, often rather ingenuous "discoveries" of merit in Scots painters, from Allan Ramsay onward, on the part of southern critical opinion.

One of the Arts Council's functions is to break down such fortuitous barriers to appreciation. It is to be congratulated on organising this exhibition, in London and other English centres, by two artists who, for some twenty years, have been looked on by their contemporaries, by their juniors, and even by most of their seniors, as leaders of their generation in Scottish painting.

Although Gillies and Maxwell have occasionally exhibited in London on a small scale, and though works by both were included in the Arts Council's "Sixty Paintings for '51" exhibition, their work is still little known outside Scotland, except to a few discerning critics and collectors. The present representative collection will help to rectify this, and it will be interesting to find whether it is generally agreed that the importance of these two painters is, as I believe, such as to justify a much wider reputation.

It would be nonsense to embark on any detailed critical estimate of their artistic qualities, or of the pictures shown, within the small compass of this note; and while neither painter is a particularly "obvious" performer (though Gillies may sometimes deceptively

appear so to the too-casual eye) the paintings can well be left to make their own impression. But a few biographical details and comments, bearing on the development of the two talents, may be helpful in assessing the exhibition as a whole.

William George Gillies was born fifty-five years ago in the lovely little town of Haddington, among the long, undulating farmlands that embrace the Firth of Forth. As a youth he painted this landscape with assiduity and with the unforced intuitive love possible only to the country-bred native. Many phases of his art have supervened since those very early, already accomplished essays, one or two of which it would have been instructive to include here. But whatever the subsequent preoccupation or influence, Gillies has never failed for long to return to this first inspiration. He is essentially a painter of the Scottish scene, perhaps even primarily of Lowland landscape.

He served in France in the latter part of the 1914–18 war, and then studied at the Edinburgh College of Art, where he is now the admired and admirable Head of the Drawing and Painting School. There, he was by far the most brilliant student of his day, winning all possible awards, including a post-graduate scholarship for study in Europe. This student stage I mention particularly because it cannot be too much emphasised that Gillies—and this applies with equal force to Maxwell—was then quite unusually proficient in the best academic sense, and that all his later work has been based on the most solid sort of traditional training.

In France and Italy he worked on his own for a year, and also at the school of that impressive teacher, André Lhote, who described him in a report to Edinburgh as *un élève à rêver*. The rigid exercises in the Lhote manner influenced him for only a year or so afterwards, but left with him a stronger sense of pictorial organisation and a fuller control of related volumes. The actual style of his French master he soon discarded, and this has also been true of later influences.

These have not been numerous, though marked enough when they occurred, since Gillies can do nothing except with enthu-

siasm. At an exhibition of the Society of Scottish Artists, a body from which he and Maxwell both graduated very early to membership of the Royal Scottish Academy, he was much impressed by a fine loaned collection of work from the Norwegian painter Munch. His reaction was an immediate loosening of forms and tensions in his own canvases, a raising of pitch, and an increased sense of the value of the "empty" space in a design, which remains so marked a feature in most of his work.

A continuation of the same trends was effected by admiration first for Matisse and later for Bonnard. The results of this are apparent in a number of the paintings here, especially in the still-lifes. But it will also be noticed that in the work of the last eight or ten years, these valuable stimuli have been quite assimilated, their effect remaining only to enhance Gillies's own personal style, which indeed was never in any danger of being submerged.

Gillies is a remarkably prolific painter, contriving with almost incredible energy to meet the heavy demands of a full-time teaching post, and to produce also at least as much work as any living painter I can recall. Zest, speed of thought and execution, and an endlessly receptive eye and mind are the keynotes of his make-up and of his apparently effortless outpouring of oils, watercolours and drawings.

John Maxwell, a close friend of Gillies, has had, outwardly, a very similar career. By eight years the younger, he too had no difficulty in outstripping all competition at the Edinburgh College of Art, and was even more impeccable in his very finished and closely studied work in the life-classes. Like Gillies, he went to France, Spain and Italy on a travelling scholarship, but seemed to be affected hardly at all by a period at the "Académie Moderne" where he worked under Fernand Léger and Ozenfant. But the transition from naturalistic study to so different a conception of painting unsettled him, and for a year or two after his return he produced little.

Then, quite suddenly, he painted the *View from Tent* (No 27) picture shown here, his first exhibit in the Academy, in 1933.

It is a "key" painting, one of the few really successful attempts to convey the intractable charm of Highland landscape, and truly original in its method of doing so. From this point his course was determined, if always difficult. For, unlike Gillies, Maxwell is a slow producer, contemplative rather than lyric, and far too prone to destroy a great proportion of his output. This accounts for the relatively small number of recent works, of which, alas, there are never many at a given time.

It will be seen that his direction can be broadly labelled "Expressionist", and as with Gillies the work of one or two painters has ministered to, but never controlled, his artistic growth. Chagall, and to a lesser degree, Paul Klee, are probably the chief among these. But the compelling fascination of his canvases springs from a nature peculiarly withdrawn, sensuous yet metaphysical in character, and of a sensibility unlike that of any other painter, certainly not to be described in words.

After teaching with great influence, in the Edinburgh College of Art for upwards of ten years, Maxwell has returned to his native Galloway, where he spends much time—too much perhaps?—on his two other passions, music and gardening. It would not be difficult to deduce these enthusiasms from the organic melodies of his work.

Finally, special attention may be directed to the watercolours and drawings. Though quite different in character, these possess a common factor in both artists, in that they are never mere pleasant trifles, however slightly done, but are approached with as serious an intention as the rest of their work; and in days when few painters make drawings other than working sketches, it is a special pleasure to see the bare bones of two distinguished talents so often and so skilfully displayed.

In their work and by their brilliant teaching, Gillies and Maxwell have had enormous influence on the younger Scots painters of today. It will not be long before the fruits of their example follow the present exhibition of their prowess.

Plate I

JOHN MAXWELL
Flowers in a
Square

No 30

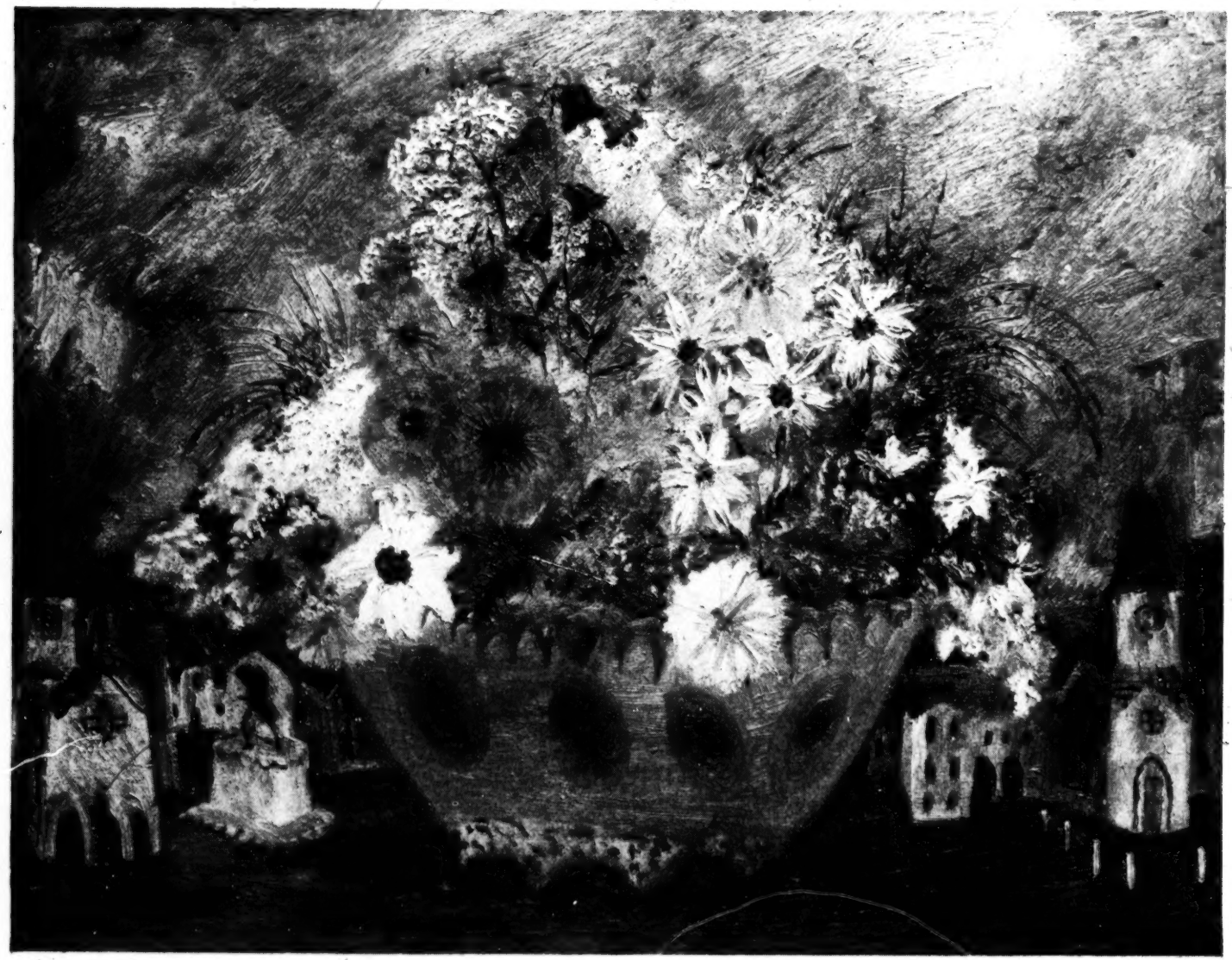


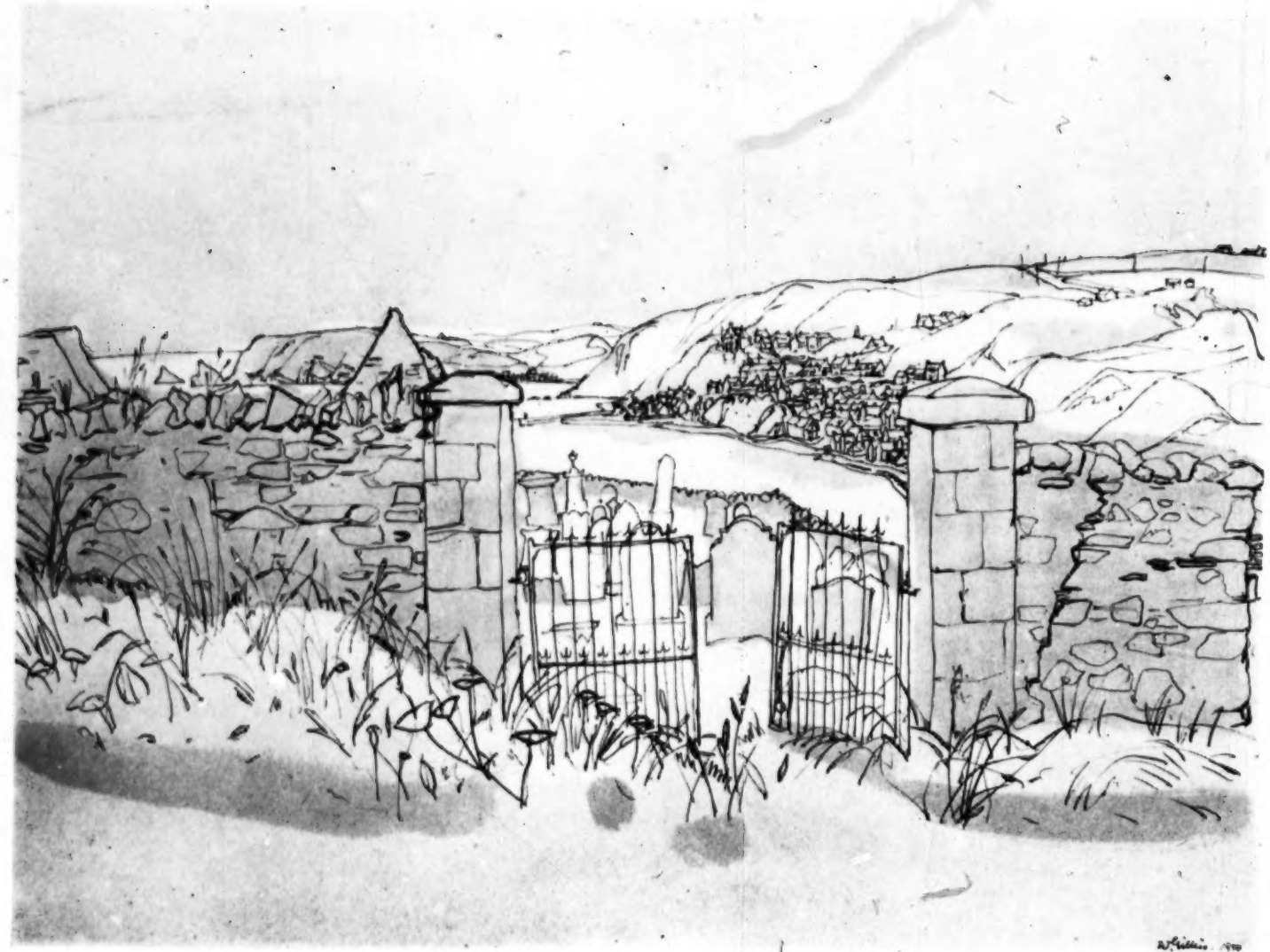
Plate II: JOHN MAXWELL : Two figures in a landscape: No 46

Plate III: W. G. GILLIES: Still life with roses: No 3

Plate IV

W. G. GILLIES
Old Churchyard,
Gamrie

No 22



Catalogue

Measurements are given in inches and height precedes width

W. G. GILLIES

Oils

1 CASTLETON FARM 1941
13 × 17
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

2 STILL LIFE 1942
29 × 24
Lent by Mrs. Sheppard

3 STILL LIFE WITH ROSES 1943 *Plate III*
26 × 22
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

4 TEMPLE 1943
12 × 17
Lent by J. W. Blyth, Esq.

5 THE PARK, ARNISTON 1944
27½ × 32½
Lent by Peter Pears, Esq.

6 DUSK, LETTERFEARN 1947
19 × 23½
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

7 STILL LIFE 1947
16 × 22
Lent by Basil Spence, Esq., O.B.E.

8 LITTLE BOUQUET 1947
11½ × 18¼
Lent by William Wilson, Esq., R.S.A.

9 FLOWER PIECE 1947
19½ × 16½
Lent by J. W. Blyth, Esq.

10 ANSTRUTHER BREAKWATER 1947
14 × 18
Lent by S. Brooks, Esq.

11 POT WITH EVERGREEN LEAVES 1948
21 × 26¾
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

12 POT OF DAISIES 1950
23 × 44
Lent by Ralph Cowan, Esq.

13 ROSEBERY RESERVOIR 1951
11 × 24
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

14 STILL LIFE 1953
22¾ × 31
Lent by Earl Haig

15 HILLSIDE, PEEBLESHIRE 1953
23½ × 32
Lent by Dr. W. A. Alexander

Watercolours and drawings

16 FLOWERS IN A POT 1946
Pen 20 × 16
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

17 CATLAW, KIRRIEMUIR 1946
Watercolour and gouache 9¼ × 17
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

18 WINTER, TEMPLE 1949
Pen and watercolour 20 × 27
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

19 THE MOOR 1950
Pen and watercolour 12¼ × 19¼
Lent by Messrs. Aitken Dott and Son

20 ROCKY COAST 1950
Watercolour 20 × 27
Lent by Mrs. M. A. Proudfoot

21 LANDSCAPE, BUCHAN COAST 1951
Charcoal and watercolour 18½ × 24½
Arts Council (Scottish Committee) Collection

22 OLD CHURCHYARD, GAMRIE 1950 *Plate IV*
Pen and wash 18 × 23
Lent by the artist

23 GARDENSTOWN HARBOUR 1952
Pen and watercolour 19 × 25
Lent by Dr. R. A. Lillie

24 FIVE TREES 1951
Pen and wash 10 × 28¾
Lent by Mrs. Frances Thwaites

25 LIMEKILN 1951
Pen and watercolour 10 × 14
Lent by Basil Spence, Esq., O.B.E.

26 CALLERCLEUGH 1953
Pencil and watercolour 10 × 12½
Lent by Colonel R. D. Q. Henriques, M.B.E.

JOHN MAXWELL
Oils

27 VIEW FROM TENT 1933
30 × 36
From a private collection

28 STILL LIFE WITH STUFFED BIRDS 1934
36 × 24
Exhib: Cat. No. 39 in British Council exhibition *Scottish Painters* shown in Toledo, Ohio, U.S.A., and Ottawa, Canada
Lent by Mrs: Elliot Smith

29 STILL LIFE IN THE COUNTRY 1936
25 × 30
Lent by D. M. Sutherland, Esq., R.S.A.

30 FLOWERS IN A SQUARE 1938 *Plate I*
21¼ × 26½
Exhib: Cat. No. 40 in exhibition *Scottish Painters*. See note to No. 28 above
Lent by Professor John Orr

31 FLOWER PIECE 1940
17½ × 13½
Lent by Mrs, Ellen Kemp

32 FALLING VASE 1938 (?)
30 × 36
Lent by Professor and Mrs. J. A. V. Butler

33 COUNTRY DANCE 1941
27 × 22
Lent by H. Scott Plummer, Esq.

34 WOMAN WITH FLOWERS 1941
31 × 21¼
Lent by Gordon Small, Esq.

35 CIRCUS PONY 1941
36 × 30
Lent by Michael Redgrave, Esq., C.B.E.

36 MAN WITH FLOWERS 1942
30 × 24
Lent by Dr. H. R. Fletcher

Watercolours and drawings

37 TWO HEADS 1937
Pen and watercolour 20 × 25
Lent by the artist

38 HARBOUR 1937
Pen, watercolour and gouache 20 × 24½
Lent by the artist

39 FIGURES IN A GARDEN 1937
Pen and watercolour 13¼ × 19¾
Lent by Hubert Wellington, Esq.

40 FLOWERS AND FIGURE—REQUIEM 1937
Pen and watercolour 20 × 25
Lent by Sir David Milne, K.C.B.

41 MONUMENTS 1937
Gouache 19½ × 24½
Lent by Miss Joyce Peters

42 THE HUNTSMAN 1940
Pen and watercolour 18 × 21¼
Lent by Gordon Small, Esq.

43 RED BALLET 1941
Pen, watercolour and gouache 20 × 27
Lent by H. Scott Plummer, Esq.

44 BIRCH TREES 1943
Pen, watercolour and gouache 16¼ × 20
Lent by Gordon Small, Esq.

45 YELLOW CLIFF 1944
Watercolour 15 × 22
Lent by Earl Haig

46 TWO FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE 1944 *Plate II*
Pen and gouache 21½ × 15
Lent by William Wilson, Esq., R.S.A.

47 LANDSCAPE 1947
Pen, watercolour and gouache 11¼ × 19
Lent by C. d'O. Pilkington-Jackson, Esq.

48 WINTER BOUQUET 1947 *Illustrated on cover*
Pen and watercolour $22\frac{1}{2} \times 17\frac{3}{4}$
Arts Council Collection

49 LANDSCAPE WITH DEAD TREES 1947
Pen, watercolour and gouache $18\frac{3}{4} \times 21$
Lent by William Wilson, Esq., R.S.A.

50 TRELLIS 1950
Pen, watercolour and gouache 17×22
Lent by Dr. H. R. Fletcher

51 RED LANDSCAPE 1949
Pen, watercolour and gouache $18\frac{1}{2} \times 21$
Lent by W. H. Kinninmonth, Esq.

52 BIRD TABLE 1951
Pen and watercolour $9\frac{1}{2} \times 18$
Lent by H. Wylie, Esq.

53 THREE FIGURES 1952
Pen, watercolour and gouache 18×23
Lent by Dr. H. R. Fletcher

54 RED CLIFFS 1952
Pen, watercolour and gouache $17\frac{3}{4} \times 29\frac{1}{4}$
Lent by William Wilson, Esq., R.S.A.

55 GREY LANDSCAPE 1952
Pen, watercolour and gouache $15 \times 22\frac{1}{4}$
Lent by Sir W. O. Hutchison, P.R.S.A., Hon. R.A.

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Introduction by David Baxandall.
1951. 11 pp. 13 illustrations. 6*d*.

BRITISH PAINTING: 1925–1950 *Second Anthology*
Introduction by Hugh Scrutton.
1951. 24 pp. 3*d*.

THREE CENTURIES OF BRITISH WATERCOLOURS, AND DRAWINGS
Introduction and notes by Brinsley Ford.
1951. 80 pp. 16 illustrations. (Postage 4*d*.) 3*s*. 0*d*.

SIXTY PAINTINGS FOR '51
Foreword by Philip James.
64 pp. Illustrations. (Postage 4*d*.) 3*s*. 6*d*.

BRITISH LIFE
Catalogue of an exhibition of paintings showing life in Britain from Queen Elizabeth I to Queen Elizabeth II.
Introduction by E. K. Waterhouse.
48 pp. 22 illustrations. (Postage 4*d*.) 2*s*. 6*d*.

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